

Understanding Herbs

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Definition

Herbs are plants with all shapes, e.g.

- Tree
- Shrub, or
- Grass

and have common features, like:

- Leaves
- Seeds
- Flowers
- Bark
- Branch

Uses

1. Herbs have a variety of uses including
 - Culinary or cooking
 - Medicinal
 - Perfuming and flavoring
 - Spiritual
2. In spiritual use any of the parts of the plant might be considered but culinary or medicinal use is related to some parts

Types

1. Culinary herbs

Culinary herbs are distinguished from veggies, like spices, they are used in small amounts and provide flavor rather than substance to food

Thyme, lavender, parsley, basil, rosemary (a shrub) and **bay laurel** (a tree) are used as both an herb and a spice, such as **Dill** weed and Dill seed or **Coriander** leaves and seeds

Types

2. Medicinal herbs

Some herbs contain **Photochemical** that have effects on the body

There may be some effects when consumed in the small levels that typify culinary **spicing**, and some herbs are **toxic** in larger quantities. For instance, some types of herbal extract, such as the extract of **St. John's-wort** or of **kava** can be used for medical purposes to relieve depression and stress

Medicinal herbs

- We will not discuss **misnomer herbs** like salt, which is a mineral, nor the **fictional plants** such as aglaophotis, or **recreational drugs** such as tobacco.
- We may discuss some plants used primarily as **herbal tea or tisanes**, or for plant products that are purely medicinal, such as valerian.

Medicinal herbs

- Modern pharmaceuticals had their **origins** in crude herbal medicines, and to this day, many drugs are still extracted as fractionate/isolate compounds from raw herbs and then purified to meet pharmaceutical standards.
- Some herbs are used not only for culinary and medicinal purposes, but also for **psychoactive** and/or recreational purposes; one such herb is **cannabis**.

Sacred Herbs

3. Sacred herbs

Herbs are also used in many religions. For example,

- **Myrrh** and **frankincense** in Christianity
- **Nine Herbs Charm** in Anglo-Saxon Paganism
- **Neem** tree by the Tamils
- Holy **basil** or *tulsi* in Hinduism
- **Cannabis** by Rastafarians
- Plants may be used to induce spiritual experiences for rites of passage, such as **vision quests** in some native American cultures.
- The Cherokee Native Americans use **white sage** and cedar for spiritual cleansing.

Top Ten Best-Researched Medicinal Herbs

1. Garlic
2. Hawthorn
3. Ginkgo Biloba
4. Ephedra
5. Licorice
6. Bilberry
7. Echinacea
8. Milk Thistle
9. Astragalus
10. Ginseng

Health Benefits of Spices and Herbs

- Spices and especially herbs have long been used for medicinal purposes throughout the world. Moderate doses of many herbs can affect digestion, heart, brain functioning and more.
- See benefits of some herbs on the next slide:

Health Benefits

- **Allspice** is thought to be efficacious in the case of stomach ailments, and as an aid to digestion.
- **Anise** may relieve bloating and indigestion. It may also help to clear breathing passages when a person is suffering from congestion.
- **Basil** exhibits anti-inflammatory properties. It is a source for Vitamin K, iron, calcium, vitamin A, manganese, magnesium, vitamin C, and potassium. Good for the heart and digestion.
- **Caraway** is thought to help with bronchitis and also may have properties that help reduce bloating and cramping.

Health Benefits

- **Cardamom** is said to relieve stomach problems and heartburn.
- **Cayenne (red) pepper** is sometimes used to stimulate the circulatory as well as digestive systems.
- Chives health benefits include anti-inflammation, anti-carcinogenic , and antibiotic.
- Cinnamon is known to be a strong antiseptic. It also has anti-microbial and anti-clotting properties.
- Cloves are good for digestion and even can be used as a mosquito repellant.

Health Benefits

- **Coriander** is actually the seed of the cilantro plant. It is thought to be helpful in relieving headaches.
- **Garlic** has similar properties to onions in that it has antibiotic and anti-microbial properties. It is thought to help prevent heart disease and strokes.
- **Ginger** helps digest high-fat foods and breaks down proteins, making it very good for the digestion. It is also thought to be good against arthritis.

Health Benefits

- **Marjoram** may help promote good digestion and relieve diarrhea. It may also work on the breathing passages by loosening mucus.
- **Nutmeg** helps stimulate the brain and also works as an anti-inflammatory. Use nutmeg in moderation as it is toxic in high doses.
- **Oregano** has been found to be effective against the *Giardia amoeba* in Mexico.
- **Parsley** may reduce cancer risk and be effective against atherosclerosis.
- **Peppermint** has been used to treat morning sickness and motion sickness.

Health Benefits

- **Saffron** may be taken to ease fatigue. Some believe that it also strengthens the cardiovascular and nervous systems.
- **Tarragon** can stimulate the appetite. In some cases it has been known to relieve gas.
- **Thyme** has an effect on cramps. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that it can also help to relieve sore throats.
- **Turmeric** (a spice commonly used in curry) is thought to ameliorate the risk of gallstones. It also has anti-inflammatory properties.

Summary

The health benefits of any particular herb or spice may vary from person to person. They also can have short-term or long-term effects. Most spices are not consumed in large amounts so the average person will not notice their effect. Even so, moderation is a virtue, and large doses of any spice or herb to achieve a desired health benefit should not be embarked upon without consulting a physician.